City of Seattle

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Joni Earl, CEO
Sound Transit
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Ms. Earl:

At the most recent meeting of the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board (SPAB), we heard a presentation from Sound Transit staff about pedestrian access to proposed North Link stations. We appreciate the time staff took to meet with us and to answer our many questions.

Transit service, especially rail transit, has great potential to enhance the pedestrian experience, and to allow pedestrians to access more of the region on foot. An important key to success of high capacity transit is to place stations close to where pedestrians want to be. Details of station location and design determine how well transit will achieve its ridership objectives, and whether transit stations will enhance the pedestrian environment.

Mezzanines and Lateral Travel

Experience with the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel has taught us that design of stations can affect how accessible a station is from the street. In DSTT stations, long walks along mezzanines from one escalator to another can add significantly more travel time and distance to get to the station. Including the escalator rides, walk along from one end of the mezzanine to the other, and walking halfway down the platform to a loading bay, getting from the street to the platform below can be similar in effort to walking for several blocks. We hope that future mass transit stations will be far more accessible to the street.

Many of the station designs we were shown for North Link stations showed multiple mezzanines, probably to minimize the land area required for each station. We urge you to consider how to minimize the total time and distance passengers need to traverse to get between a station entrance and the platform. If multiple mezzanines are needed, please locate escalators to minimize the need to walk

across each mezzanine. In most cases it should be possible to walk off of one escalator and onto the next without crossing a mezzanine unless there is a need to cross a fare collection barrier. Ideally, pedestrians should be able to exit a station without more than two escalator trips.

Station Entrances

The most successful rapid transit systems are designed to place station entrances as close to where pedestrians want to be as possible. In great systems elsewhere in the world, transit patrons emerge onto lively public squares - they are not dropped off by freeway offramps. We hope that station entrances will enliven the places they are located by bringing pedestrians into places with potential to become great public spaces.

There can be an urban design benefit to keeping pedestrian movements at the street level to activate public place rather than to provide grade-separated crossings. However, there is no urban design benefit to bringing patrons who are already below grade to the surface on the opposite side of the street from where they want to be - especially if they are trying to make a connection to a bus or paratransit vehicle. Mass transit stations bring platoons of pedestrians to a crossing location, often more than street corners are designed to accommodate. If signal cycles are long, or patrons are trying to catch a connecting bus, a station entrance across the street from a major destination can present an invitation to jaywalk unsafely.

At Capitol Hill station, the major destination near the proposed station is the Seattle Central Community College, across the street from the station. Broadway is a busy traffic street, and every effort should be made to place a station entrance on the west side of the street near the campus. Similarly, Broadway and John is a busy intersection and difficult to cross. It is also a major transfer location between light rail and the number 7 and 43 buses. If grade-separated crossings serving transfers aren't feasible, a pedestrian scramble signal (red in all directions during ped phase) should be considered.

The Montlake station will be on the opposite side of the street from virtually all major destinations in the area. Montlake Boulevard has some of the heaviest traffic of any intersection in the area, and the signal cycle is long. While pedestrians arriving randomly can safely cross the Montlake triangle, large platoons of pedestrians waiting to cross and jaywalking is very likely to create safety problems and delay for both pedestrians and traffic. The travel times on foot from the proposed station location to major pedestrian generators is already long, and every additional barrier increases the perceptual distance and the attractiveness of using transit. Station locations should be placed as closely as possible to the UW hospital and the main UW campus near the Burke-Gilman trail.

The choice between 8th and 12th Ave. stations is clear from a pedestrian point of view. An elevated station at 8th Ave. NE would be essentially in the freeway environment, at the freeway grade. Unless huge sound abatement structures are constructed, the noise experienced by transit patrons on the platform would be intense and unpleasant. The freeway station would be less accessible to the Roosevelt business district, catering to park and ride passengers. We believe strongly that in-city rail stations should cater to pedestrian centers, and that park-and-ride lots (if provided) should be dedicated to vanpools and non-Seattle transit destinations that are difficult

to connect to with direct bus service from each neighborhood. In contrast, a station at 12th NE is likely to have a greater positive impact on the local pedestrian environment than many other proposed stations. Already, local plans and development patterns have begun to shape in a pedestrian-friendly way, partially in anticipation of an eventual rail station being located nearby. It would be a major mistake to locate the station in the freeway environment, and to miss a golden opportunity to achieve the pedestrianization benefits that rail is intended to provide.

Conclusion

We understand that many of the proposed stations have already been designed at the conceptual level and costed, and that additional costs added at this point can result in a smaller project or a longer implementation period. However, we feel that pedestrian access and proximity of station entrances to pedestrian destinations is key to the function and success of mass transit, and areas that have compromised on pedestrian access have seen disappointing results. We hope that Sound Transit will not compromise key functionality in future phases of light rail, including placing station entrances to minimize walk times and traffic barriers to reach major destinations.

SPAB appreciates the opportunity to be informed and involved in the development of mass transit services in Seattle. We hope you will keep us informed as designs for North Link stations evolve and change. Thank you for your work to make Seattle a better pedestrian city through the design and implementation of mass transit service.

Sincerely,

Matthew Amster-Burton
Chair
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Rob Fellows
Member
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board

cc: Grace Crunican